

McWrigglers:

Claim: McDonald's hamburgers contain worm meat.

Status: FALSE

Origins: Common sense should tell you this rumour is false. Pound for pound, earthworms cost more than beef -- it doesn't make sense to use a filler that's more expensive than what's being replaced. Ah, but rumors don't rely upon common sense. It's the "yuck!" factor that gets us.

The earthworm (sometimes kangaroo meat) additive whisper has bedeviled McDonald's. (In some locales, the local Jack in the Box is fingered instead of McDonald's.) Officially dating back to 1978 (it might well be older -- one reader recalls hearing it in 1973 or 1974) and of uncertain origin, this tale has a long tradition of being believed. By one common account, CBS's *60 Minutes* dug up the worm scandal; in fact, it never had.

Adding credibility to these tales, many corporate rumors include the names of television news or talk shows -- either the rumor was investigated and found to be true by [*name of investigative show*] or the CEO of whichever company appeared on [*name of talk show*] and admitted [*horrifying thing*]. One wonders at all these CEOs with something to hide showing up on talk shows. One also wonders at the prescience of those who book the guests, for one wouldn't think a chat with the relatively anonymous CEO of a large corporation would make for that interesting a show.

As to what kind of damage a rumor like this can do, the experience of one owner of four McDonald's in Atlanta, Georgia, was typical. Back in 1978 he saw his sales plunge by 30% and consequently had to lay off about a third of his employees. Corporate rumors aren't victimless.

McDonald's did what they could to refute the lie. Quoting from the 27 November 1978 issue of *Newsweek*:

At an Atlanta press conference, McDonald's officials, backed by a regional officer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, denounced the rumors as "completely unfounded and unsubstantiated," and swore that the company's hamburgers contain nothing but beef.

The 1 October 1982 *Financial Times* further confirms the involvement of the Feds by saying that "the story gained such wide circulation that McDonald's held a press conference to rebut it and even obtained a letter from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture attesting to the pure beef content of its burgers." Perhaps the final word on this subject should belong to Ray Kroc. From the 30 April 1992 issue of *Time*:

Ray Kroc, who bought McDonald's from Mac and Dick McDonald in 1955, added his own assurances: "We couldn't afford to grind worms into our meat," he countered. "Hamburger costs a dollar and a half a pound, and night crawlers six dollars."

Barbara "would you like fries with that?" Mikkelson

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